

## **UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:**

The Lewistown Field Office is preparing a resource management plan (RMP) for BLM land in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The RMP will guide resource decisions on approximately 375,000 acres of BLM land.

The schedule:

- 2002 -- conduct public scoping and begin collecting data;
- 2003 -- collect data and develop alternatives;
- 2004 -- develop alternatives and estimate effects;
- 2005 -- estimate effects and release draft RMP/environmental impact statement (EIS);
- 2006 -- respond to comments and release a final RMP/EIS and record of decision.

### **ISSUES:**

On January 17, 2001, the president designated the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument with a presidential proclamation. The proclamation recognizes the spectacular array of biological, geological and historical resources found on public lands in this area, and the designation presents the public and BLM with an important opportunity to prepare a management plan to establish guidance, objectives and management actions for these lands and resources.

The proclamation emphasizes that the BLM will remain the managing agency for these public lands. The BLM is responsible for seeking public input and using that information throughout the RMP and EIS planning process.

Scoping was the first stage of the planning process and closely involved the public with identifying issues, providing resource and other information, and developing planning criteria to guide preparation of the RMP. Our scoping process included 11 public meetings in July 2002, and generated 5,700 letters and emails. The scoping process identified these issue categories: access and transportation; health of the land and fire; natural gas exploration and development; and visitor use, services and infrastructure.

In July 2003, the BLM hosted 11 workshops across north-central Montana to gather management ideas from interested members of the public. The alternative development process generated 7,200 letters and emails.

In March 2000, the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) filed suit in District Court contending that three oil/gas leases issued in 1999 within the monument were issued with an inadequate leasing document (West HiLine Resource Management Plan). In March 2004, the judge ordered the BLM to prepare an EIS for the oil and gas leasing program that covers the three leases as well as a biological assessment of the leasing program. The judge also ordered the BLM to consult with all Native American tribes. As a result of the judge's order, the BLM has decided to delay the RMP for 9-12 months in order to include an analysis of 12 existing oil and gas leases within the monument.

### **MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:**

This RMP is a multi-year process that will require an ongoing commitment of agency resources.

### **BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:**

Public interest is high both locally and nationally. About 6,600 people and organizations are on the RMP mailing list. The conservation community and those involved in the tourism industry continue to support the monument designation. Those involved with agriculture along the river or in the uplands fear the monument designation will impact their ability to use their private land and/or their BLM grazing permits within the monument. American Indian tribes are concerned about protecting cultural sites within the monument.

### **CONTACT:**

Gary Slagel, Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Manager, (406) 538-7461